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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by National Alliance of Women's Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

The theme of this, the 51st meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, is of profound importance, focusing as it does on the girl child: our next generations. NAWO applauds all those involved in the process of bringing this vital issue to the attention of UN agencies and States Parties through this CSW.

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) represents a significant network of women's organisations and individuals headquartered in England. With a special focus on gender and Europe, NAWO seeks an end to gender inequality and advocates on behalf of its members for the establishment of social justice based on internationally agreed human rights instruments for all women. NAWO works closely with sister organisations in the United Kingdom and with the European Women's Lobby.

NAWO is particularly concerned to highlight the trafficking of girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation which constitutes a heinous modern day form of slavery and urges those present at CSW to address this matter urgently.

Gender equality cannot be achieved until all forms of violence, which occurs at all stages of a woman's life cycle from conception to death, are fully addressed. Most forms of violence against women are first perpetuated against the girl child beginning in the womb in the form of selected birth abortion to the female genital mutilation of girls as young as three or four months old, to sexual abuse in the form of rape and incest, to the trafficking of young girls as young as five or six for the purposes of sexual exploitation, to early forced marriage in adolescence.

Specifically, NAWO would like to call attention for the need to address more fully the demand-side of trafficking of young girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Demand for young girls is often generated and perpetuated by media stereo-types that portray young girls as sexual commodities to be consumed. In particular, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to both traffic actual girls, i.e. advertising which girls are available, and to traffic pornographic images of girls without their consent, is an area that has been overlooked and needs to be urgently addressed.[i]

As one recent report notes, "...traffickers and others use ICTs to shape public norms about women in ways that make trafficking and sexual exploitation more acceptable. Representations of women in pornography, sex tourism and marriage sites and in other online ads, all work to compound acceptance of violence against women."[ii]

NAWO calls on the United Nations system in and through all its bodies and agencies and on States Parties, in particular those from the ECE region, to conduct research on how ICTs are currently being used to facilitate and normalise the exploitation of girls as well to as explore how ICTs can be used to promote positive transformation of gender roles. One area of research should be focused on the abuse of ICTs.

At this CSW where the role of men and boys in achieving equality is being reviewed, it is imperative that the demand side of trafficking is fully explored and mechanisms set in place to stop impunity for perpetrators.

Education is a powerful tool for empowerment and thus can be used to promote positive gender roles as a way of minimising the demand for trafficked girls. Boys need to be educated from an early age regarding the value and dignity of girls and women rather than encouraging the notion that they are objects to be exploited. Pedagogical models that promote the value and worth of girls so they are never more seen as commodities to be bought and sold, need to be encouraged, developed and implemented.

Media as a method of communication, education and cultural exchange is currently one of the most powerful influences in society. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the debate on the role of the media to stop violence and discrimination against girls is continued with growing momentum at this CSW. In addition resources need to be provided such that the media begins to promote most actively, across borders and boundaries, a positive image of girls and women as controllers of their own destiny, whose contribution to society enables the world to be a better place; and without whose contribution the world and its peoples cannot attain the prosperity and happiness they could so easily achieve.

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[i] Karen Maltzahn, "Digital Dangers: Information and Communication Technology and Trafficking in Women, Association for Progressive Communication, http://www.genderit.org/upload/ad6215b74e2a861

[ii] Ibid, pp. 7-8